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S U P P L E M E N T

SOVIET DEBATE OVER ROLE OF MILITARY POWER DURING DETENTE

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SOVIET DEBATE OVER ROLE OF MILITARY POWER DURING DETENTE

Power in itself does not guarantee peace and much less detente.

--Georgiy Arbatov, PRAVDA
22 July

The higher the military might and combat readiness of the armed forces of the USSR . . . the broader the opportunities for consolidating and developing the successes of the policy of peaceful coexistence . . .

--Col. I. Sidelnikov, RED STAR
14 August

The recent successes of Soviet diplomacy in improving relations with the United States and West Germany and in paving the way for a further relaxation of international tensions appear to have sparked a debate within the Soviet Union over the role of military power in an age of nuclear weapons and international detente. The debate, as it has thus far emerged in public, reflects a dichotomy of civilian and military interests centering on both current and long-term issues. On the one hand, it concerns the level of military expenditures and the related question of the availability of resources for civilian needs. On the other, it concerns the best ways and means of consolidating the international gains thus far achieved by the Soviet Union--the choice between a high or a low military posture as an adjunct of Soviet detente diplomacy.

An illuminating aspect of the current debate, which is otherwise cast in seemingly scholastic and largely esoteric terms, may be found in polemical allusions to the validity of Lenin's dictum (borrowed from Clausewitz) that war is a continuation of politics by other means. This Leninist doctrine has traditionally served as the rationale for a broad range of practical concerns in the military-political realm. There are indications that this doctrine is now undergoing re-examination as a result of recent developments in East-West relations. In the past, it has served as a rallying point for military theorists opposed to the notion that the advent of nuclear weapons has altered the relationship between war and politics and has limited the role of military power as an instrument of policy. Those arguing for a reinterpretation of Lenin's thesis have emphasized the unacceptable consequences of a nuclear war for all sides and the existence of more viable policy alternatives.

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The last such review of the Leninist thesis occurred shortly after Khrushchev's fall in October 1964, when the doctrine was unsuccessfully challenged by those who maintained that "in our time there is no more dangerous illusion than the idea that thermonuclear war can still serve as an instrument of politics."

SIDELNIKOV ARTICLE The most recent and the most forthright contribution to the emerging debate was by RED STAR propaganda department head Col. I. Sidelnikov in the paper's 14 August issue. The thrust of Sidelnikov's article, entitled "Peaceful Coexistence and the Security of Peoples," was to warn against euphoria over an apparently diminishing military danger from abroad and to contend that the recent successes of Soviet diplomacy can be consolidated most effectively not through a "slackening of vigilance" but through enhanced "military might." He bluntly described the ideal order of priorities in the military-political realm:

Soviet soldiers are profoundly aware that the higher the military might and combat readiness of the armed forces of the USSR and all armies of the fraternal socialist countries and the higher their cohesion and cooperation, the more durable peace on earth, the more reliable the security of our peoples and the broader the opportunities for consolidating and developing the successes of the policy of peaceful coexistence and for making irreversible the positive changes in the international arena.

Due to obvious implications for his view that detente does not lessen the role of military power, Sidelnikov strongly defended the validity of Lenin's thesis on war and politics against those who feel that international detente and the U.S.-Soviet nuclear understanding call for a new look at Soviet military doctrine and the limits of military power. In this connection he referred to unnamed "military theorists and publicists" who he said are "now returning" to the problem of examining the implications of nuclear weapons for Lenin's thesis. "Many of them," he observed, "are connecting their interpretation of this problem with the relaxation of tension and the Soviet-American agreement on the prevention of nuclear war." In contrast to other recent commentary, Sidelnikov went on to warn against the limitations of the nuclear accord; as he put it, while reducing the possibility of a nuclear outbreak, the accord "still does not mean a prohibition of nuclear weapons."

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Expanding on the agreement's limitations, Sidelnikov offered two arguments against any revision of Lenin's thesis. First, pointedly listing the five nuclear powers, he stated that as long as they possess nuclear weapons the Soviet Union must remain ready to "wage war with the use of any means of armed struggle." He thus cautioned that Soviet strategy must take into account the nuclear potential not only of the United States but of China and other Western nations as well. Secondly, while noting the "enormous influence" of nuclear weapons on the conduct of warfare, he flatly declared that, in any case, "no weapon can change the political essence of war."

TARGETS OF DEBATE Although Sidelnikov failed to identify those allegedly seeking to re-examine Lenin's thesis in the light of recent international developments, his argument for peace through strength appears to be a direct rebuttal to recent articles by spokesmen for two of the Soviet Union's prestigious foreign policy "think tanks." One of the articles, entitled "Leninist Principles of Foreign Policy in Action," was published in RED STAR on 4 July and was authored by Dmitriy Tomashevskiy, a prominent member of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow. The other, entitled "Soviet-American Relations in the New Stage," appeared in PRAVDA on 22 July under the signature of USA Institute head Georgiy Arbatov, a leading Soviet publicist as well as a member of the Brezhnev delegation to the United States last June.*

In the RED STAR article, which appeared shortly after Brezhnev's U.S. visit, Tomashevskiy downplayed the influence of Soviet military power on the "positive changes" said to be occurring in the international arena. He instead argued that the "realistic trend" in the West is greatly aided by the "consistent and unswerving pursuit by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries of a peace-loving foreign policy." As if to dramatize the limits of nuclear power as an instrument of policy, Tomashevskiy reflected on the calamitous consequences of a new world war, which would "threaten the very existence of entire countries and peoples and lead to grave disasters for mankind" and whose impact would fall "primarily on its direct participants." In keeping with this philosophy, he invoked Lenin's authority to stress the intimate relationship between domestic and foreign policy and the decisive impact of the former on the latter. According to Tomashevskiy,

* The Tomashevskiy and Arbatov articles are examined in the TRENDS of 11 July 1973, pages 22-23, and 1 August 1973, pages 11-13, respectively.

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"Lenin considered the main (domestic and international) tasks" of the Soviet regime to be basically domestic concerns--"the organization of economic construction and practical steps in the direction of socialism."

The Arbatov article in PRAVDA conveyed a strong warning that Soviet foreign policy objectives cannot be attained through reliance on military power alone. Declaring that "power in itself does not guarantee peace and still less detente," Arbatov went on to argue that attempts by either the United States or the Soviet Union to enhance its strategic position would be met by off-setting efforts on the other side. He insisted that the "consistently peace-loving foreign policy course" of the Soviet Union played a decisive part in the recent improvement of international relations. And to drive the point home, he emphasized that by waging a "peace offensive" at a time when the Soviet Union and its allies have acquired "greater power than any time in the past," Moscow was successfully undermining the Western "myth" of an alleged Soviet military threat.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS The recent signs of debate over the role of military power in an age of nuclear weapons and international detente may be related to the perennial debate over priorities in the national budget, which is usually unveiled at the December session of the USSR Supreme Soviet. In this respect the Sidelnikov article is similar to a RED STAR article last summer which reaffirmed military priorities in the wake of the Moscow summit and other successes in the leadership's detente policy.* The author, Col. V. Khalipov, writing in the 21 July 1972 issue, had attacked as "insufficiently mature and shortsighted politically" those who supposed that successful implementation of the principle of peaceful coexistence would "permit a slackening in our military preparedness." Khalipov's article appeared to be timed to the yearly debate on budget priorities, just as Sidelnikov's may be.

But the differences in the Khalipov and Sidelnikov articles are at least as revealing as the similarities. Reflecting the still extant U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the earlier stage in the evolution of U.S.-Soviet relations, Khalipov supported his argument for further enhancement of Soviet defense capability by specifically attacking U.S. arms programs and by focusing

* The article is discussed in the TRENDS of 2 August 1972, pages 28-30.

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attention on the still "complex and contradictory" international situation. There was no suggestion, moreover, that detente had aroused any interest in a reexamination of strategic doctrine.

Sidelnikov, on the other hand, acknowledged the import of recent changes and eschewed attacks on the United States, becoming specific only when dealing with NATO's alleged resistance to recent developments. He made his case simply by observing the limited nature of the agreements reached thus far and by couching his arguments in the language of the April CPSU plenum--linking progress toward "irreversible" changes in world affairs to the further growth of Soviet military power.

The Sidelnikov article may also be viewed as an attempt to nip in the bud recent hints that Soviet leaders hope to extract immediate peace dividends from detente in the form of increased attention to civilian needs.* Brezhnev alluded to such hopes in a Moscow speech on 11 July and again in a 26 July speech in Kiev. In his Kiev speech Brezhnev observed that the international atmosphere had become "noticeably warmer," and he declared that as a consequence "it is easier to concentrate on the solution of peaceful, constructive tasks and on affairs really worthy of man." It is noteworthy that both PRAVDA and IZVESTIYA picked up Brezhnev's Kiev remarks as the keynote of their 31 July accounts of the opening of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet session devoted to the improvement of consumer services, whereas RED STAR, perhaps sensitive to the budgetary implications, chose to ignore Brezhnev's remarks in its coverage of the session. Although Brezhnev did not expand on his suggestions of a peace dividend in his most recent speech in Alma Ata on 15 August, he nonetheless recalled that improvement of civilian welfare was the "main" goal of the 24th CPSU Congress.

It is noteworthy in itself that the Sidelnikov article offers the first direct confirmation of an emerging review of the Leninist doctrine on war and politics in light of recent developments in East-West relations. The possibility that such a re-examination was developing was suggested by a strongly worded reaffirmation of Lenin's thesis in an otherwise obscure article by the prominent hardline military theorist Maj. Gen. A. Milovidov in the 17 May RED STAR.** The review is significant since that doctrine

* For an analysis of such hints, see the TRENDS of 8 August 1973, pages 8-10.

** For an analysis of the Milovidov article, see the TRENDS of 13 June 1973, pages 22-23.

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has traditionally served as the rationale for a broad range of practical concerns in the military-political realm. As in the case of the thesis on war and politics, the recurrent need to affirm supposedly "immutable" principles of Marxism-Leninism is perhaps the best outward indication of the movement of ideas in the Soviet Union.

BACKGROUND Debate concerning the impact of nuclear weapons on basic strategic doctrine began with Malenkov's 1954 thesis that nuclear war could lead to the destruction of civilization. The debate percolated throughout the Khrushchev era and surfaced prominently in the immediate aftermath of his fall, when the well-known military theorist General Talenskiy stated forthrightly in the May 1965 INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS that "in our time there is no more dangerous illusion than the idea that thermonuclear war can still serve as an instrument of politics." That position was subsequently repudiated in a series of attacks by conservative opponents, and the issue was ostensibly laid to rest.

Sidelnikov is a long-time proponent of conservative views on military affairs. During Khrushchev's efforts in the early 1960s to reduce military spending and flirt with his own version of detente, Sidelnikov had weighed in with a RED STAR article on 30 August 1960, entitled "The Higher the Level of Military Preparedness, the More Secure is Peace on Earth," which in words almost identical to those in his current article, cautioned that the higher the military might of the Soviet Union, "the more solid is peace." In a 19 September 1963 RED STAR article with Col. V. Smitrenko, he had argued--echoing a statement by then First Deputy Defense Minister Grechko a few months earlier--that as long as universal disarmament was not achieved, the armed forces of the socialist world must be superior to those of the West. That assertion appears to be an earlier and more adamant version of his recent affirmation that as long as the five nuclear powers maintain their arsenals the Soviet Union must be prepared to wage war with all possible means.

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